

May 1, 1978

Dear Harold:

I appreciated your letter of March 17 on Argentina. I share your belief that we need to make effective use of the time and flexibility remaining before the October 1 legislative cutoff of arms sales to Argentina to persuade the Argentine Government to improve its human rights practices.

There have been some recent improvements in the human rights situation in Argentina, but these are more than outweighed by the continuing disappearances and the tragic, unexplained deaths of two nuns and five other women who were abducted in December. In view of this situation and the strong Congressional interest in our policy on arms transfers to Argentina, we think it would be best at this time not to go ahead with the pending arms transfer cases and not to grant the Argentine request to purchase training.

Instead, we suggest that a team consisting of senior State Department officials and senior U.S. military officers should meet at a high level with representatives of the Argentine Government. The team would explain that because of human rights abuses in Argentina, we are not in a position to act favorably on either the large number of arms transfer cases that has accumulated or the Argentine request to purchase training, and that only substantial, authentic human rights improvements in Argentina would permit us to change our position on these matters.

The Honorable
Harold Brown,
Secretary of Defense.

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The team would inform the Argentines that if they curtail the irregular detention and abduction practices used by the security forces, and establish and meet a schedule for charging and trying -- or releasing -- those held under executive authority, we will respond in a calibrated and sequential fashion, as the human rights improvements occur, with approvals of the pending matters. Depending upon Argentina's response to the foregoing, the team would have authority to indicate approval of some of the pending cases.

I have asked that proposed instructions for the team be promptly prepared in conjunction with DOD. I think the team should leave for Buenos Aires within the next ten days. I hope you will agree that the inclusion of senior U.S. military personnel in such a team would have a substantial and desirable effect on the Argentines.

Sincerely,

~~SECRET~~

4/27

The Secretary

signed the letter
to Brown (Tab 1).

His question re training can be accommodated in the team's instructions, which I have asked ARA to begin to prepare.

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